



School of Liberal Arts

October 7, 2015

Thomas Adams, Executive Director
Instructional Quality Commission
Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division
California Department of Education
1430 N Street, Room 3207
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: K-12 History and Social Science Framework Revisions

Dear Dr. Adams and Instructional Quality Commission Members:

I am Professor, Social Ethics, Law, and Public Life, and Director of the Center for Engaged Religious Pluralism and Director of the Interfaith Leadership Program at Saint Mary's College of California. I am writing today regarding the proposed draft of the K-12 History and Social Science Frameworks in my capacity as a world religions textbook author and an advocate for interfaith cooperation and understanding.

I applaud the Commission for its efforts to revise the Frameworks, and I find that the representation of various world religions in the current draft includes several positive aspects. At the same time, I see that there are still certain sections that require further revision.

I am concerned that lines 1543-1546 in the draft, which states "Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak, a social reformer who challenged the authority of the Brahmins and the Hindu caste order," is not quite accurate. Although it is very important to recognize the contributions of Guru Nanak and to recount the significance of the emergence of the Sikhs, it should not be done in a manner that reflects adversely on another religion and in a way presents a skewed perspective.

The above statement implies that caste was solely a Hindu practice, when in fact it affected many religious communities in the Indian subcontinent during that time period. Further, the language could leave readers with the impression that caste is an integral part of Hinduism. In that regard, the language contradicts lines 876-877 of the draft Framework, which emphasize that caste was a "social and cultural structure rather than a religious belief."

Similarly, the implication that Brahmins had exclusive authority over Hindu society is incorrect, especially when one takes into account the significant influences of the Bhakti movement, which made personal and communal devotional practice central to Hinduism. Bhakti emphasized personal divinity and de-emphasized the role of priests across much of the Indian subcontinent—and it remains the dominant popular expression of Hinduism.

Consequently, I respectfully urge the Commission to remove the phrase “challenged the authority of the Brahmins and the Hindu caste order” and replace it with more accurate language that does not reflect adversely on Hinduism, while still positively representing Sikhs. I leave to you the decision of how to frame the language, of course, but urge you to gather input from Sikhs and Hindus, who I am sure are able to help you work toward language that is mutually respectful and more accurately reflects historical circumstances.

Finally, I recommend that lines 1553-1554 be revised to reflect that Hindus and Jains also were persecuted under Mughal rule, which is in conformity with historical accounts.

Thank you in advance for considering these suggested edits, and please feel free to contact me if additional information is required or assistance is needed. I commend you for taking a balanced approach in your thoughtful consideration of the representation of all religions in K-12 textbooks.

Sincerely,

/s/

Barbara A. McGraw, J.D., Ph.D.
Professor, Social Ethics, Law, and Public Life
Director, Center for Engaged Religious Pluralism
Director, Interfaith Leadership Program
Saint Mary's College of California
1928 Saint Mary's Road
Moraga, California 94556
Co-Author (with Robert S. Ellwood): *Many Peoples, Many Faiths: Women and Men in the World Religions, 10th ed.* (Pearson Education, 2014).